

Message Text

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S E C R E T SANA 1755 SECTION 1 GN 2

BEIRUT PASS BAGHDAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MASS, PFOR, YE SA, UR
SUBJ: YEMEN PRESIDENT HAMD'S INTENTION ACCEPT SOVIET MILITARY
ASSISTANCE

REF: JIDDA 4328

FOR ASSISTANCE SECRETARY ATHERTON FROM AMBASSADOR

1. SUMMARY. FONMIN ASNAG INFORMED ME JULY 3 THAT IN VIEW OF
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CONTINUED SAUDI DILATORINESS IN IMPLEMENTATION MODERNIZATION

PROGRAM FOR YEMENI ARMY, PRESIDENT HAMDI HAS NOW AGREED TO ACCEPT SOVIET OFFER OF MILITARY ASSISTANCE. ASNAG GAVE ME WHAT WAS BOTH RATIONALE OF THIS DECISION AND AN INDICTMENT OF CAVALIER SAUDI POLICIES VIS-A-VIS YEMEN WHICH STILL WANTS CLOSE RELATIONS WITH BOTH SAUDI ARABIA AND USG. ASNAG SAID THAT ANNOUNCEMENT OF HAMDI'S ACCEPTANCE TO GO TO MOSCOW WILL BE MADE ON JULY 9 AND THIS IN TURN WILL TRIGGER IMMEDIATE SOVIET SUPPLY OF KEY EQUIPMENT (INCLUDING AIRCRAFT, TANKS, AND ARTILLERY) BEGINNING IN LATTER PART OF AUGUST. ASNAG SAID HE WAS INFORMING ME OF THIS DEVELOPMENT IN HOPE USG MIGHT STILL BE ABLE TO DO SOMETHING TO PREVENT CONTINUED SOVIET PRESENCE IN YEMEN WHICH PRESENT YEMENI REGIME HAS LONG BEEN TRYING TO REMOVE. THIS STEP NOT SURPRISING TO US IN VIEW SAUDI INSENSITIVITY AND PROCRASTINATION AND HAMDI CAN HARDLY BE BLAMED. WHILE YEMEN RATHER PERIPHERAL TO US INTERESTS IN AREA, IT NONETHELESS OCCUPIES STRATEGIC POSITION IN PENINSULA WHEN SEEN AGAINST RISING SOVIET AND EXTREMIST INFLUENCE IN LOWER RED SEA AREA. STRONGLY RECOMMEND THAT WE DISPATCH HIGH-LEVEL MESSAGE TO SAG SOONEST IN EFFORT TO INDUCE SAUDI ACTION. MEANWHILE, IN SPITE OF RECOGNIZED DOMESTIC US DIFFICULTIES, ALSO RECOMMEND THAT SERIOUS CONSIDERATION BE GIVEN TO POSSIBLY DIRECT US "SYMBOLIC" MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO YEMEN IN ORDER OBTAIN BREATHING SPELL TO ENABLE SAUDIS TO MOVE. WE SHOULD ALSO REALIZE THAT YARG IS NOT BLUFFING.

2. ON THE MORNING OF JULY 3, AT MY REQUEST, FOREIGN MINISTER ASNAG RECEIVED ME AT HIS OFFICE IN ORDER THAT I MIGHT BRIEF HIM ON SUBSTANCE REFTE). (ALSO PRESENT WERE PRESIDENT ADVISOR MOHAMMED BASINDWA AND MINISTER OF STATE MOHAMMED ABDO SAID; LEGAL ADVISOR HUSAIN HUBAISHI PRESENT LATER IN MEETING).

3. AFTER LISTENING TO MY PRESENTATION, ASNAG THANKED ME AND SAID THAT HE HAD IMPORTANT CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION TO CONVEY TO ME. ASNAG THEN INFORMED ME THAT IN VIEW OF CONTINUED SAUDI INABILITY OR UNWILLINGNESS TO MOVE ON MODERNIZATION PROGRAM FOR YEMENI ARMY, PRESIDENT HAMDI HAS RELUCTANTLY DECIDED TO ACCEPT SOVIET OFFER FOR RE-SUPPLY OF YEMEN ARMY. ASNAG SAID THAT SOVIET AMBASSADOR HAS BEEN EXTREMELY PERSISTENT AND PERSUASIVE OVER PAST SEVERAL WEEKS TRYING TO GET HAMDI TO AGREE TO ACCEPT FORMAL SOVIET INVITATION TO MOSCOW ON THE UNDERSTANDING THAT ONCE DATE IS SET FOR THE VISIT THE SOVIETS WILL IMMEDIATELY MAKE PREPARATIONS FOR URGENT SHIPMENT TO

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YEMEN OF "MAJOR QUANTITIES OF MODERN EQUIPMENT INCLUDING MIG 21'S, HEAVY TANKS, ANTI-AIRCRAFT GUNS, ARTILLERY AND ROCKETS". SOVIET AMBASSADOR, ACCORDING TO ASNAG, STATED THAT SOVIETS WILLING AND ABLE TO PROVIDE THIS EQUIPMENT WITHOUT ANY COST TO YEMEN. ASNAG CONTINUED THAT YARG NOW PLANS TO ANNOUNCE ON JULY 9TH PRESIDENT HAMDI'S ACCEPTANCE OF SOVIET INVITATION. PLAN CALLS FOR HAMDI TO VISIT SOVIET UNION IN THE FIRST PART OF AUGUST.

4. ASNAG STRESSED SEVERAL TIMES THAT HAMD'I'S ACCEPTANCE WAS MADE AFTER MUCH ANGUISH AND DELIBERATION AT THE HIGHEST LEVELS OF THE YARG. ASNAG SAID THAT YARG WISHES MORE THAN ANYTHING TO CONTINUE TO COOPERATE WITH SAUDI ARABIA BUT THE SAUDI RULERS DO NOT SEEM TO UNDERSTAND THAT RECENT POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN YEMEN CLEARLY INDICATE THE PRO-SAUDI AND PRO-WEST NATURE OF THE PRESENT YEMEN REGIME. ASNAG SAID THAT THE YEMENI LEADERSHIP HAS TRIED EVERYTHING TO PROVE THEIR BONA FIDES TO THE SAUDIS. RECENTLY, FOR EXAMPLE, PRESIDENT HAMD'I RECEIVED AN OFFICIAL INVITATION TO VISIT IRAQ. THE YARG IMMEDIATELY CONTACTS ITS "SAUDI BROTHERS" TO ASCERTAIN THEIR REACTION. THE SAUDIS ADVISED HAMD'I NOT TO ACCEPT THE INVITATION AND THE YARG SO INFORMED IRAQ. ASNAG STATED THAT EARLIER THE SAUDIS DISUADED YEMEN FROM ACCEPTING AN IRAQ OFFER TO BUILD AN OIL REFINERY WITH THE PROMISE THAT THE SAUDIS WOULD CARRY OUT THIS PROJECT. ASNAG NOTED THAT ALMOST A YEAR HAS ELAPSED AND NOTHING HAS BEEN DONE. ASNAG ALSO MENTIONED A SAUDI PROMISE TO MODERNIZE THE YEMENI AIRLINES AND THIS ALSO HAS NOT BEEN DONE AFTER 8 YEARS. ASNAG CONTINUED THAT WHILE THE YARG HAS BEEN BENDING OVER BACKWARDS TO ACCOMMODATE THE SAUDIS, THE LATTER HAVE BEEN HOLDING SECRET NEGOTIATIONS WITH PDRY WHICH HAS BEEN OPENLY HOSTILE TO YARG. YET THE SAUDIS HAVE MADE NO EFFORT TO KEEP YARG INFORMED OF THE PROGRESS OF THESE TALKS. AT THE SAME TIME THE SAUDIS HAVE BEEN WILLING TO PROVIDE MAJOR AMOUNTS OF ASSISTANCE TO SOMALIA WHILE WARNING THE YARG OF TOO CLOSE RELATIONS WITH THAT STATE BECAUSE OF ITS MARXISM AND ITS PRO-SOVIET POLICIES.

5. ASNAG POINTED OUT THAT YARG HAS BEEN WAITING FOR ALMOST TWO WEEKS FOR PRINCE SULTAN TO SET THE DATE FOR THE VISIT TO RIYADH OF PRIME MINISTER ABD AL-GHANI TO BE IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWED BY DEPUTY COMMANDT-IN-CHIEF GHASHMI. SULTAN ORIGINALLY PROPOSED JULY 21 WHICH WAS ACCEPTABLE TO YARG. A FEW DAYS AGO SULTAN POSTPONED PRIME MINISTER'S VISIT TO AUGUST 1 WITHOUT SETTING DATE FOR

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GHASHMI VISIT. ASNAG CONTINUED THAT IT IS THIS KIND OF SAUDI BEHAVIOR WHICH MAKES YEMENIS WONDER IF SAUDIS TAKE THEM SERIOUSLY. ASNAG SAID THAT HE AND HIS COLLEAGUES ARE "BITTER" ABOUT CONTINUED SAUDI SUSPICIONS OF YEMENI INTENTIONS AND ABOUT HIGH-HANDED SAUDI TREATMENT. THE MOST RECENT INSTANCE WAS THE LAST MINUTE SAUDI WITHDRAWAL OF PERMISSION OF PRESIDENT'S HAMD'I'S PLANE TO FLY OVER THE EMPTY QUARTER WHICH MEANT THAT THE PARTY HAD TO FLY THROUGH THE JIDDAH-RIYADH AIR CORRIDOR ARRIVING IN ABU DHABI AN HOUR AND A HALF LATE. THIS SAUDI ACTION TAKEN AFTER THE PLANE WAS FIVE MINUTES IN THE AIR EXTREMELY EMBARRASSED PRESIDENT HAMD'I NOT ONLY WITH HIS UAE HOSTS BUT ALSO BEFORE THE PLANE'S SOVIET CREW WHICH WAS OPENLY LAUGHING AT THIS "TRUST BETWEEN ARAB BROTHERS".

6. ASNAG SAID THAT EVERYONE IN THE AREA ACCUSED HAMD'I AND THE

PRESENT YARG OF BEING AMERICAN AGENTS AND SAUDI STOOGES. FOR
EXAMPLE WHEN PRESIDENTIAL ADVISOR BASINDWA WAS RECENTLY IN LIBYA
THE FOREIGN MINISTER OPENLY CHARGED THE YARG OF BEING "IMPER-
IALIST AGENTS". THE LOCAL PLO REPRESENTATIVE HAS ALSO BEEN PEDDLING
THIS LINE AND A WEEK AGO THE YARG ASKED ARAFAT TO REMOVE HIM.
DESPITE THESE CHARGES, THE YARG HAS BEEN UNABLE TO PERSUADE SAUDI
ARABIA THAT YEMEN IS TRULY ITS FRIEND. ASNAG OPINED THAT IN VIEW OF
THE CONTRADICTORY AND DOUBTING SAUDI POLICY TOWARDS YEMEN ONE CAN
ONLY CONCLUDE THAT THE SAUDI REGIME WISHES TO SEE YEMEN REMAIN

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